

### **Remarks at the National Governors' Association Dinner**

*February 22, 1998*

Good evening. Governor and Mrs. Voinovich, Governor and Mrs. Carper, ladies and gentlemen, welcome again to the White House. Hillary and I always look forward to this night every year. It brings back a lot of happy memories. And I'm especially glad to have you here this year.

I want to begin by thanking you, all of you, for the contributions that you have made to the success that the United States is now enjoying. The American people have the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years, the lowest crime rate in 24 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 27 years, the lowest inflation rate in 30 years. And a lot of that credit goes to you and the people with whom you work and the commitments that you have made to forge the right kind of government for this new era in which we live. A lot of you work every day at building a government that is smaller but more effective, that works as a catalyst and a partner, does actually give our people the tools they need to make the most of this remarkable time in which we're living.

I also want to say I looked at the document you prepared for your meeting; I read it this afternoon while I was thinking about a few other things, but I enjoyed it very much. And I think it shows that you agree with me that these good times, impose upon us a special obligation to make the most of them, to strengthen our country for the century ahead.

You know, this country was founded by people who came here seeking relief from the arbitrary exercise of absolute power. They thought they had a better idea. They thought that when free people were able to pursue happiness and work to form a more perfect Union, they could build a truly remarkable society. And more than 200 years later, I think we'd all have to admit that they were right.

I have said many times, but I would like to say again, that it seems to me that at every important time in our country's history we have been faithful to the basic ideas of our Founders, no matter what the challenge was. We have always improved America when we

deepen the meaning of our freedom, widen the circle of opportunity, and strengthen the bonds of our Union.

For your contributions to that, I am profoundly grateful. I hope you enjoy this evening. I look forward to tomorrow. And I'd like to ask everyone here to join me in a toast to the Governors of the 50 States and all the territories—[laughter]—and everybody else who is here.

*[At this point, a toast was offered.]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:30 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to chairman of the National Governors' Association Gov. George V. Voinovich of Ohio and his wife, Janet; and vice chairman Gov. Tom Carper of Delaware and his wife, Martha.

### **Remarks at the National Governors' Association Meeting**

*February 23, 1998*

Good morning. Governor Voinovich, Governor Carper, Mr. Scheppach, and to the members of the administration that are here, and all the Governors, let me welcome you back to the White House. Before I begin, let me say what I know is on all of our minds—our thoughts and prayers are with the people in central Florida where tornadoes have now killed 28 people. Governor Chiles is going to visit with our FEMA Director, James Lee Witt, the area today, and they will have our concerns with them.

I'd also like to say I'm sorry we're starting a little late, but I've been working on the situation in Iraq. The Vice President and I met with National Security Adviser Berger this morning. Last night, just before our dinner, I spoke with the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and I have called Prime Minister Blair this morning; we had a long talk about the situation. I still have to talk to President Yeltsin and President Chirac, and I may have to leave the meeting and then come back. But that's all I have to say now, but I'm sorry we're starting a little late.

I'd like to confine my opening remarks—and I'll try to truncate them since we're starting late—to education. For 20 years now,